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Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000800050004-1

27 March 1973

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: A Warning Flag on Possible Vietnamese Communist  
Military Plans

I. BACKGROUND

1. At the time the Paris Agreements were signed on 27 January, the general view within the U.S. intelligence community was that Hanoi, by and large, intended to abide by the overall provisions of these agreements, at least for a considerable period of time. Though no one felt the Vietnamese Communist Party had abandoned its objective of acquiring political control over all of Vietnam, there was a widespread belief throughout the intelligence community -- and the U.S. Government in general -- that at least over the immediately foreseeable future, Hanoi intended to pursue its southern ambitions by concentrating primarily on political action. It was accepted that such political action would certainly be supplemented by subversion, terrorism and small-scale (guerrilla-type) military pressure in the provinces. Nonetheless, it was deemed unlikely that Hanoi would soon initiate another round of major offensive activity involving large military units.

2. The above-described judgment was based on the best evidence available. It may well have been accurate as of early February and, indeed, may still be accurate. Some of the past two month's events, however, strongly suggest that even if this was the Hanoi Politburo's policy as of late January, either (1) the Politburo has changed its mind or, at least (2) is rethinking its decision and reassessing its options.

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3. In any event, developments have occurred over the past eight weeks which, of themselves, can legitimately be read as warning signs that a sharp rise in the level and extent of Communist military offensive activity in South Vietnam may be imminent. Admittedly, not all the signs point unambiguously in this direction. Enough of them do, however, to warrant the raising of this warning flag.

## II. RELEVANT EVIDENCE

4. The most significant evidence is, of course, the overall pattern of post-January Communist behavior with respect to the augmentation of their southern forces' personnel strengths and equipment inventory. The details of this infiltration activity have been extensively discussed in our last five weekly "violations" memoranda and need not be rehearsed here.

a. In manpower, Communist forces in South Vietnam's Military Region 1 are virtually up to their peak level of the 1972 offensive. Communist forces in South Vietnam's other three Military Regions are not yet up to this level, but their ranks have been greatly replenished over the past several weeks and even the clearing of what is now in the infiltration pipeline would go a long way toward putting them in a combat ready position.

b. In terms of equipment, the Communists now have as many tanks, as much artillery, and above all, more AAA and other air defense resources in South Vietnam than they have ever had before. In some politically key areas (e.g., MR 3) the Communists now have resources (e.g., 130mm artillery) they did not have last year.

5. Since the end of January, we have received more than a dozen clandestine reports of alleged cadre briefings saying that the Communists are now planning to resume large-scale military action

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in South Vietnam. These reports come from all regions of South Vietnam and many come from reliable sources. Though legitimate questions can be raised with respect to each individual report (e.g., could it be morale-building exhortation rather than a real reflection of higher-level decisions), they all fall into an increasingly widespread and generally consistent pattern. Also, such reports are becoming steadily more frequent. These reports tend to converge around two alternate dates for the initiation of their alleged upsurge in Communist military action: shortly after 28 March and shortly after 28 April.

6. There are other straws in the wind, each of which can be given a different explanation but all of which are consistent with the hypothesis that a sharp rise in Communist military activity may be imminent. For example:

a. Communist foot-dragging on the Laos negotiations could be designed to keep the 60-day "withdrawal clock" from starting.

b. The rapid augmentation of Communist AAA capabilities, particularly in MR 1, is the type of augmentation noted on the eve of the 30 March 1972 offensive, i.e., an augmentation suggesting the Communists are about to do something they think will provoke retaliation.

c. Communist actions at Tonle Cham and Rach Bap certainly look like efforts to unblock the Saigon River corridor to permit the movement of heavy artillery and/or major units toward the immediate Saigon area.

d. The 23 March PRG announcements (reported in the Can Tho Consulate General's telegram 0083) that its delegates in My Tho and Can Tho are withdrawing -- without any accompanying explanation -- could be read as a classic indicator that an enemy offensive in the Delta is imminent.

SECRET

### III. LOGIC

7. Logic lends further credence to evidence such as that recounted above. The Communists are understandably bearish about their prospects for achieving much success in South Vietnam through political action and primarily political competition. (They probably share the view recently expressed by a member of the Hungarian ICCS contingent, namely that the Communists currently exert control over only a small part of the population and in an election could win only about 20% of the vote.) The record of the past several months strongly suggests that small-scale Communist military action is not likely to produce many gains that GVN counteraction cannot soon erase. If the prospects for political action and/or small-scale military action look gloomy, that leaves basically two broad options:

- a. Deferring the Party's southern ambitions for an indeterminate period, or
- b. Sharply increasing the level of military pressure.

In the Vietnamese Communist lexicon, (a) spells acceptance of defeat. If the Party is unwilling to accept defeat or the serious prospect thereof, then its thoughts and plans must perforce focus on (b).

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

8. In light of the above, we have two further projects urgently in train:

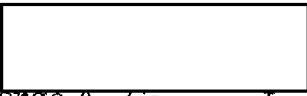
- a. A "net assessment" comparison of the present relative military strengths of GVN and Communist forces in South Vietnam.

- b. A more thorough, detailed analysis of the evidence summarily cited above designed to put it in the best perspective possible.

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9. This memorandum does not attempt to convey a net or balanced judgment. Its object is to raise a clear and unambiguous warning flag, namely that a plausible case can be made for the thesis that Hanoi plans to initiate major offensive military action in South Vietnam within the next few weeks and perhaps within the next few days.

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George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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25X1

27 March 1973

REPORTS SUGGESTING AN IMPENDING COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE  
IN VIETNAM

Date of  
Information

Summary of Report

Late January 1973

Several fairly reliable Viet Cong sources reported during the last week of January that COSVN headquarters was telling its cadres in western MR 3 that the ceasefire was temporary and would last for only 60 days -- i.e., until 28 March when all U.S. troops would have been withdrawn. [redacted] dist. 5 February 1973)

9 February 1973

According to [redacted] in Gia Dinh Province of MR 3, a new COSVN directive called for Viet Cong cadres to rebuild their military forces. The directive also stated that if the National Council for National Reconciliation and Concord was not established within three months after the ceasefire -- i.e., by 28 April -- the Viet Cong would launch attacks throughout South Vietnam. The intent of the attacks would be to force the GVN to accept Communist terms for the establishment of the council. [redacted] dist. 3 March 1973)

19 February 1973

According to a source with good access to [redacted] to launch land-grabbing attacks after 28 March, when all U.S. forces will have been withdrawn. [redacted] dist. 28 February 1973)

19 February 1973,  
and 1 March 1973

[redacted] Cong  
[redacted] stated  
[redacted] received instructions to prepare for  
a resumption of military activity by 28 April.  
[redacted] dist. 28 February 1973)

[redacted]  
[redacted] military units in the province were still under  
standby orders from higher authorities  
[redacted] prepared for an all-out offensive. [redacted]  
[redacted] dist. 14 March 1973)

Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000800050004-1

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Date of  
Information

Summary of Report

Late February 1973

[REDACTED] ntly captured by [REDACTED] stated that he was briefed in late February by a superior officer on North Vietnamese plans for a "major offensive." This offensive was to begin shortly after 28 March. [REDACTED] was the NVA 711th Division, located in Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces of MR 1. [REDACTED] described in some detail the targets which had been assigned to his division for the first phase of the new offensive. [REDACTED] dist. 20 March 1973)

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Late February 1973

A new and untested Viet Cong source in Quang Ngai Province of MR 1 reported that Communist cadres in his area were being told as of this date that the Viet Cong would try to recapture Sa Huynh on the central coast of South Vietnam by 31 March. This report contains no details, however, on how the Communists plan to do this. [REDACTED] dist. 16 March 1973)

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28 February 1972

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] years stated on this date that he was convinced the Communist leadership will mount a major military offensive "within the next few months." The source felt that this offensive would probably come in the period following the departure of the last U.S. military forces. [REDACTED] dist. 1 March 1973)

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28 February 1973

A [REDACTED] in the western Me [REDACTED] on this date that the NVA/VC were planning to mount another offensive after U.S. forces were withdrawn from South Vietnam on 28 March. [REDACTED] dist. 12 March 1973)

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Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000800050004-1

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Date of  
Information

Summary of Report

2 March 1973

A new and untested Viet Cong source in the western delta region of MR 4 reported that as of this date Viet Cong cadres in his area were being briefed on future Communist military plans. According to the source, no large scale military operations would be launched until the end of March, because the Communists do not want to do anything which might stop the U.S. military withdrawal. After the end of March, the Communists will launch larger-scale attacks, which will continue until the GVN agrees to accept proposals which the Viet Cong will present in future negotiations. [redacted], dist. 12 March 1973)

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Early March 1973,  
mid-March 1973

[redacted]

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[redacted]

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14 March 1973

[redacted]

Superior officers had told him that Communist military forces are planning a new offensive which will begin in late April. If the GVN does not come to terms on a political settlement by 28 April, or ninety days after the ceasefire, the Viet Cong will no longer abide by the Paris agreement and the new offensive will begin. (TDCS 21/100000) [redacted] dist. 23 March 1973)

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25X1

Date of  
Information

Summary of Report

19-21 March 1973

Two low-level Viet Cong sources on these dates described Communist plans to attack specific villages and areas in Binh Duong and Hau Nghia Provinces of MR 3. These attacks are to take place "soon, sometime after 1 April 1973." [redacted] dist. 24 March 1973)

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VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 27 March 1973

TO: The Director  
FROM: GACarver, Jr.  
SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

1. Attached is a package I have sent to Brent Scowcroft. Prior to its dispatch I convened my colleagues in OCI, ONE, OER and DDO/FE. None of them voiced any objection to it.

2. As indicated in my cover note, work on the two other studies is in train and they should be ready for transmission by Friday.

/s/

George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

cc: DDCI  
DDO  
DDI  
OCI  
ONE  
OER  
VNO

O/DCI/SAVA:GACarver/mee  
Orig - General Scowcroft  
1 - Mr. Kennedy  
Copies as indicated on buckslip  
1 - VAS/RAC  
1 - GAC Chrono  
1 - Bill C  
1 - White House Special Projects

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S E C R E T

27 March 1973

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Communist Intentions in Vietnam

REFERENCE: SAVA Memorandum, "A Warning Flag on Possible Vietnamese Communist Military Plans", 27 March 1973

1. In view of the evidence, it is appropriate to raise a "warning flag" with respect to the possibility of an imminent and sharp rise in the level and extent of Communist military activity in South Vietnam. It would be unfortunate, however, if concern over this possibility served to detract attention from a more likely and no less serious Communist strategy. What is now going on -- and what will continue to go on -- is a major effort to absorb part of South Vietnam into the DRV's civil and military administration. Whether or not the Communists resort at some future date to large-scale offensive action to complete the process of absorbing South Vietnam will depend on Hanoi's assessment of the risks. But such action is almost certainly not likely for another year at least due to fear of heavy bombing of Hanoi and uncertainties with respect to assistance from Moscow and Peking.

2. The strategy of absorption does require some military action. GVN pockets and salients within Communist-controlled territory must be

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5. It has been argued that the lack of Communist political appeal in the South gives the GVN the edge in any situation in which Hanoi "defers" large-scale military action for an extended period of time. It is said that such a "deferral" spells acceptance of "defeat" by Hanoi because the Communist apparatus and military force would tend to lose its strength and commitment while confined in the boondocks. The argument here is that these assumptions are not correct, that the Communists are bent on creating a presence in South Vietnam not envisaged by the allied side under the Paris Agreements.

6. This presence will appear increasingly to the South Vietnamese as solid, permanent, and above all, threatening. It will grow in visibility and its identity as an extension of the northern administration will gradually emerge for all to see. Meanwhile, if things evolve as Hanoi expects, the US presence will fade, the South Vietnamese will feel unprotected, and in due course Hanoi will decide the psychological situation is ripe for an intensification of terrorism, political seduction, and incremental military pressures.

7. How the GVN responds to Hanoi's strategy and pressure depends in part on US attitudes and commitments. But once Thieu is convinced that the Communists intend to establish a permanent and working administrative and military presence in the South, his reactions are predictable. He will

-3-

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seek full US backing for a renewed military effort to drive the Communists out, making the case that Hanoi was violating understandings clearly expressed in the Paris Agreements. Failing that, Thieu would at least ask the US for sufficient aid to allow the ARVN to apply heavy pressure on its own against Communist forces and supply routes within South Vietnam.

\* \* \* \* \*

8. While the strategy outlined above does not pose an imminent threat to the survival of the GVN -- as would a large-scale Communist offensive -- it is not too early to consider what should be done to make it fail. The problem here is that most measures which come immediately to mind involve some form of ARVN and/or US military action which could well appear unprovoked or indirect political pressures likely to have little effect on Hanoi.



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